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REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING, 6-10 MAY 1991, NEW YORK

Chairman-cum-Rapporteur: H.E. Mr. Ramiro PIRIZ-BALLON (Uruguay)

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING, ELECTION OF THE RAPPORTEUR, ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The Standing Committee for Programme Matters held its first inter-sessional meeting in New York from 6 to 10 May 1991. The President of the Governing Council, H.E. Mr. Ramiro Piriz-Ballon (Uruguay), served as Chairman of the Committee.

2. At its 1st meeting, on 6 May 1991, the Standing Committee adopted the provisional agenda and tentative schedule of work contained in annexes I and II, respectively, to document DP/1991/SCPM/L.2. The Committee agreed to keep its schedule of work flexible and decided that the Chairman of the Committee should act as Rapporteur.

II. MID-TERM REVIEWS OF COUNTRY AND INTERCOUNTRY PROGRAMMES

3. For its consideration of this item, the Standing Committee had before it documents DP/1991/6 and Add.1-8.

A. Summary of the discussion in the Committee

4. The Standing Committee resumed its consideration of selected mid-term reviews, begun at its first session in February. At that time, eight reviews were introduced to the Committee and discussion was completed on the reviews relating to the African region. The summary of the discussion in February

concerning Angola and Nigeria is reproduced below. The Committee took up the item again with comments on the six remaining mid-term reviews. These were for the Arab States and European region, the regional programme and Yemen; for the Latin American and Caribbean region, Costa Rica and Jamaica; and for the Asia and Pacific region, Maldives and Pakistan.

Angola

5. While taking account of the mid-term review, the observation was made that the resources of the United Nations Development Programme were too dispersed to have real impact. It was also felt that more emphasis should be placed on human development; school enrolment levels, especially of women, were mentioned in this context. One delegation expressed appreciation of the coordination role of UNDP and welcomed its own synergetic relationship with UNDP.

6. Response of the Administration. The Associate Administrator appreciated the comments made and anticipated that the next country programme would reflect greater concentration of UNDP resources as well as a greater focus on human development.

Nigeria

7. The thoroughness of the mid-term review was commended and the recommendations relating to the monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes as well as recommendations on project identification, formulation and approval were endorsed by delegations. Support was expressed for the six recommendations on training listed in the report and for the decision to establish a national database for Nigerian human and institutional resources to help make use of local talent.

8. Information was requested concerning steps taken to overcome the obstacles mentioned in the report, whether the national technical cooperation assessment and programme (NaTCAP) exercise foreseen in June 1990 had been undertaken and whether the national information database on human and institutional capacities was established.

9. Response of the Administration. In reply, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA) informed the Committee that the obstacles mentioned in the report stemmed from the fact that the Nigerian administration lacked knowledge of UNDP policies and procedures. Through a UNDP project, the Government had launched workshops to provide training to government officials, both at the federal and State levels, in the management of technical cooperation and UNDP policies and procedures.

10. Though the pace of NaTCAP exercise in Nigeria was slow, an international consultant and a national chief technical adviser had already been appointed and the Government was setting up a national NaTCAP committee. The Standing Committee was also informed that with the support of a UNDP project, a successful seminar on management development had been organized recently. The

project would provide a national database on human resources for planning in Nigeria.

Regional programme for Arab States

11. The Committee noted and welcomed the emphasis on the environment. In this context some delegations supported the establishment of the Centre for Environment and Development in Arab States and Europe emphasizing the importance of the regional dimension. Questions were raised by some delegations about the proposal to assist in the establishment of a regional institute for environmental matters. These delegations felt that it might be more appropriate for environmental issues to be dealt with by existing institutions. It was also pointed out that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other informal entities should be involved in the regional programme. The Committee was informed that a meeting would be held, probably in Rabat, from 8-10 July 1991 to discuss the proposed Centre. At that meeting, emphasis would be placed on networking.

Yemen

12. The decision of the mid-term review to shorten the ongoing programme by one year was welcomed. A narrower, sharper focus of UNDP resources was also favoured. Concern was expressed at the review's finding that the provision of counterparts had proven to be a problem. Reference was also made to the reported weakness of agency backstopping in some cases.

13. Several delegations expressed their concern for the grave economic and social consequences of the Gulf crisis. In this context, reference was made in particular to the return of almost one million Yemenis as well as the new responsibilities in the economic and social structures after Democratic Yemen and Yemen merged to form a single State on 22 May 1990. Some delegations further pointed out the impact of the merger on programme implementation and that this should be taken into account when preparing the fifth cycle country programme.

14. It was suggested that UNDP should take more of a leading role in the policy dialogue. The question was raised as to the effects on the country programme of the unification of the country and the implications thereof for the next cycle.

15. Response of the Administration. In reply, the Standing Committee was informed that a round-table conference was foreseen for Yemen. This would address, inter alia, the issues raised by the Committee. It was also anticipated that the next country programme would be more focused than previous programmes.

Costa Rica

16. Concern was expressed at the apparent poor coordination among United Nations agencies. Concern was also expressed at the fragmentation of the

programme. Queries were raised regarding the high percentage of equipment inputs as well as the socio-economic relevance of assistance to the National Museum. The lack of counterpart personnel was noted and the suggestion made that selection criteria for projects should be more rigorous. The comment was made that UNDP should concentrate its resources more on the policy dialogue than on specific projects.

17. It was pointed out that 10 of 23 projects originally foreseen in the country programme had not been taken up. Conversely, 9 unforeseen projects had been introduced. The question was raised whether this reflected deficiencies in the country programme as drawn up, or a shift in priorities.

18. Response of the Administration. In reply, the Committee was informed that the fragmentation of the programme was a direct consequence of the many demands made on UNDP cooperation and the limited indicative planning figure (IPF) resources available. Consequently, the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC) had established a clear policy to help identify priority needs, formulate and even initiate project activities. However, with no additional resources forthcoming, the question arose why UNDP was apparently alone in funding these activities. Often as a result of this kind of exercise, and with the consent of the Government, such project activities are phased out to reserve resources for tasks which, with other sources of funding, can achieve the impact not otherwise possible with the limited resources of UNDP. It is expected that the register of such small-scale projects will show a drop in the fifth programming cycle, when the programme approach will allow UNDP to institute budgets by theme, within which specific initiatives can be pursued without in every instance having to assign a separate project number. It was pointed out that most equipment inputs pertained to projects that address the transfer and adaptation of technology.

19. In reference to the poor coordination indicated among United Nations specialized agencies, the Committee was informed that, among other things, the implementation of the Special Plan for Economic Cooperation for Central America requires close coordination between multilateral, bilateral and subregional institutions. Nevertheless, the Resident Representative in Costa Rica would be requested to comment and provide additional examples of effective coordination at the field level. He would also be requested to take into account all the comments raised by the Committee in the forthcoming preparations of the fifth country programme, with special reference to the need for effective counterpart support and the areas to be selected for UNDP support, including the Costa Rican institutions which would receive assistance.

20. Finally, it was noted that the change in the projects included in the fourth country programme reflected a marked shift in national priorities caused by a change in government.

Jamaica

21. Discussion focused on the fact that only 50 per cent of IPF resources had been programmed when the review was held. Reference to co-financing was of little consequence if available funds were not utilized.

22. The fragmentation of UNDP resources was commented on. It was suggested that they should be focused on a limited number of objectives, particularly those where the UNDP comparative advantages could be exploited and the lessons of past experience applied. It was felt that UNDP should work closely with the Government in human resources development and public sector reform.

23. Response of the Administration. The Director, RBLAC, noted that in the Latin American and Caribbean region, UNDP was often called upon to finance pre-investment or pre-programme studies. These activities are primarily targeted at the subsequent attracting of cost-sharing resources.

24. The information contained in the report on IPF commitment at the time of the mid-term review was unfortunately not correct: the Committee was informed that the entire IPF for the fourth cycle was currently committed. The precise status of the programming of the IPF at the time of the mid-term review would be contained in the revised annex to be issued as a corrigendum to the mid-term review report.

25. The areas of human resource development and private sector reform, in addition to the strengthening of the public sector management capacity, continued to be prime areas for emphasis in the Jamaica country programme. Continued efforts would also be undertaken to focus the programme increasingly on priority areas.

Maldives

26. Delegates welcomed the significant role of UNDP in the policy dialogue. Further involvement in environment, decentralization and the promotion of women was encouraged.

27. It was felt that UNDP had a special role to play in aid coordination in the Maldives. In that respect, it would be useful if other donors' complementary efforts could also be mentioned when reviewing UNDP activities. In fact, co-financing had been attracted to UNDP-supported projects. Reference was made to the UNDP Special Facility through which donors may contribute through UNDP to projects in the Maldives and clarification was sought on the purpose of this facility.

28. Response of the Administration. The Director, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, welcomed the suggestion that other donors' activities also be considered in mid-term reviews of country programmes, especially that the UNDP Special Facility (Trust Fund for Maldives) was approved to assist the Government in attracting and utilizing small amounts of funding which may become available from bilateral sources by combining these resources in support of priority programmes and projects for which additional funding may be required.

Pakistan

29. It was noted that the country programme had undergone some shift in priorities. This reinforced the desirability of harmonisation between the timing of the country programme and that of the national plan to avoid a gap or misalignment of priorities. It was also noted that 34 of the new projects approved related to projects not foreseen in the country programme and the view was expressed that this was a variation from the envisaged thrust and interest of the country programme.

30. It was also stated that the fragmentation of the programme appeared to diminish impact. On the other hand, the emphasis on human development, including women in development, and the switch to higher national priorities were welcomed. Interest was expressed in the progress of and constraints to national execution.

31. Response of the Administration. In reply, the Regional Director explained that the large number of new projects approved which were not originally in the country programme was due to the large unallocated resources combined with the new emerging priorities in the social and fiscal sectors. The adoption of the programme approach will in the future reduce the number of projects in the country programme and will also greatly facilitate the systematic identification of new projects. Furthermore, the Government has already requested a one-year extension of the current country programme in order to bring it in line with the national development plan. A study to examine fully the issue of government capacity for national execution in Pakistan is currently under way.

Further discussion of the Committee

32. In addition to the country-specific issues raised, the following were among the points raised by some delegations which suggested furthermore that they could be taken into account in the future work of UNDP; some delegations felt that the issues might well be given further consideration before action is taken:

(a) Mid-term reviews are useful and important exercises. They can improve the quality and impact of UNDP technical cooperation by providing lessons to be fed into future programming. They also help the Governing Council to understand better how programmes work;

(b) Mid-term reviews should offer more information on links between UNDP projects and those funded by other donors;

(c) Mid-term reviews must be analytical rather than descriptive and state how project and financial resources are linked to objectives;

(d) When country programmes undergo major changes from the original, approved document, they should be brought to the attention of the Governing Council. In this context, the importance of flexibility in programming was

also stressed. The Administrator confirmed that current procedure required that significant changes in the approved country programme be brought to the attention of the Council: indeed, the mid-term review reporting process would bring such cases before the Council;

(e) UNDP should reduce the fragmentation of its resources by focusing on a few, well-selected national objectives, human development, including human resources development, and other themes recommended by the Governing Council;

(f) UNDP should target its resources to areas and levels of intervention where it offers comparative advantages;

(g) In particular, UNDP should be an active partner in the national policy dialogue.

B. Recommendation of the Committee

33. The Standing Committee recommended that the Governing Council take note of the overview report on mid-term reviews (DP/1991/6) and the following mid-term reviews of country programmes under the fourth programming cycle: Angola (DP/1991/6/Add.1); Nigeria (DP/1991/6/Add.5); Regional Programme for Arab States and Europe (DP/1991/6/Add.8); Yemen (DP/1991/6/Add.7); Costa Rica (DP/1991/6/Add.2); Jamaica (DP/1991/6/Add.3); Maldives (DP/1991/6/Add.4); Pakistan (DP/1991/6/Add.6).

III. EVALUATIONS

34. For its consideration of this item, the Standing Committee had before it documents DP/1991/17, DP/1991/22 and DP/1991/61.

A. Summary of the discussion in the Committee

1. The Social Dimensions of Adjustment project

35. Delegates supported the need for the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project to continue with major changes. The implications of including other agencies and UNDP acting as the secretariat has to be carefully worked out. One delegate felt that the report was biased in its criticism of the World Bank and that the use of International Development Association resources was justified.

2. Evaluation of HaTCAPS

36. Delegates endorsed the overall recommendations contained in the report. The need for a comprehensive approach to national capacity-building, the active participation of other United Nations agencies in the assessment of

capacity-building needs, the active involvement of bilateral donors, the possibility of extending the exercise to local and regional levels, and the need to ensure complementarity between structural adjustment programmes and NaTCAPS were emphasized. Steps to put the recommendations into operation were called for; actions being taken were indicated by the Director, RBA.

3. Evaluation of UNDP assistance to intergovernmental organizations in Africa

37. The secretariat highlighted the problem of the proliferation of international government organizations (IGOs) and consequent weaknesses in financial administrative capacity to achieve objectives noted in the report. It was generally felt by delegates that UNDP assistance must be concentrated on areas in which UNDP has a comparative advantage. Even though a long-term framework of assistance is needed, it should be worked out by the IGOs since UNDP of necessity has to work within the five-year programming cycles.

4. Capacity-building for aid coordination in the least developed countries

38. Delegations supported the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It was, in particular, suggested that they be taken into account in the preparation and the implementation of country programmes in the fifth programming cycle. Some delegations stressed that in its effort to strengthen the capacity of the least developed countries (LDCs) for economic and aid coordination, UNDP should address the issues of effectiveness of the civil service, including incentives, remuneration and the use of the private sector.

5. Report of the Administrator on evaluation

39. Several delegations expressed appreciation for and interest in the report of the Administrator on evaluation (DP/1991/22). It was noted that the Governing Council would consider the report at its thirty-eighth session.

40. The issues of country programme evaluations, and the need for the evaluation of UNDP efforts in support of human development were raised, as was the need for thematic evaluations in support of Governing Council decision 90/34.

41. The Administrator confirmed UNDP support for a strategic approach to evaluation and noted that Governing Council decision 90/34 was already fully reflected in the work plan for evaluation in the fifth cycle.

42. The issue of follow-up to evaluation was raised; it would be responded to at the thirty-eighth session of the Governing Council. Delegations expressed their support for UNDP efforts to develop national monitoring and evaluation capacity, and for the expanded use of ex-post evaluation and impact evaluation.

43. The Administrator thanked those delegations who had indicated support for the strengthening of evaluation in UNDP in the light of the focus on human development, national capacity-building and the six areas laid out in Governing Council decision 90/34. UNDP plans to strengthen evaluation are reflected in the Administrator's comments on the management consultants' report (DP/1991/51), which will be before the Governing Council at its thirty-eighth session.

B. Recommendation of the Committee

44. The Standing Committee decided to recommend to the Governing Council to take note of the evaluations and the statements made by delegations concerning the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project; the national technical cooperation assessments and programmes; UNDP assistance to intergovernmental organizations; and capacity-building for aid coordination in the least developed countries.

IV. PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 1991, INCLUDING FIELD VISITS TO TAKE PLACE IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1991

45. For its consideration of this item, the Standing Committee had before it documents DP/1991/SCPM/L.1 and DP/1991/SCPM/1.

46. The Committee discussed its programme of work for the thirty-eighth session as contained in document DP/1991/SCPM/L.1. Bearing in mind the large number of country programmes which the Committee will have to consider in 1992, members commented on the guidelines for the preparation of country programmes and suggestions were made as to elements in future guidelines. The Secretariat made the present guidelines for advisory notes available.

47. Several delegations recommended that in addition to the items proposed in annex I of document DP/1991/SCPM/L.1, the following items should be taken up by the Committee at its thirty-eighth session: guidelines for country programming; national execution and capacity-building strategy; programme approach; preparations for Special Programme Resources (SPR) programming; and presentation of the Nordic United Nations project. Some delegations expressed the view that the question of allocation of items and additions to the programme of work of the Standing Committee for Programme Matters should be considered by the Governing Council. In this context, some delegations expressed the view that the allocation of items is clearly defined in decisions 90/23 and 91/2.

48. The discussion of the Standing Committee concerning its field visits involved the broad participation of members. The discussion centred on the following questions: scope and objectives, organization of visits, selection of themes or topics, reporting to the Standing Committee, composition, periodicity and timing. The Secretariat was asked to prepare a draft terms of reference for the thirty-eighth session in the light of the views expressed

during the deliberations of the Standing Committee as well as during informal consultations. The Committee recommends that the discussion thereon be finalized in June.

V. OTHER MATTERS: UNDP GULF TASK FORCE

49. Delegations commended the work of the Gulf Task Force, its rapid response to the crisis and the quality of the documentation. Several delegations hoped that updated material on the impact of the crisis would be made available to the Governing Council at its thirty-eighth session. Some delegations also noted the importance of going beyond immediate humanitarian needs towards sustainable solutions to the medium- and long-term problems created by the crisis.

50. A few delegations requested more information on UNDP work at the field level, and on its role within the United Nations inter-agency effort. One delegation asked about activities in response to the need of Iraqi refugees. Two delegations reaffirmed that the impact of the Gulf crisis had reached beyond the immediate region, and urged that South Asian countries be included in the SPR allocations to enable them to respond to the needs created; for example, to reintegrate returning labour migrants. Several other delegations also described the impact of the crisis on their countries and the environment and the need for SPR resources to enable them to respond; some noted that requests from their countries were forthcoming.

51. One delegation emphasized the importance of building national capacity in the area of the environment. Another delegation felt the mandate and scope of work of the Gulf Task Force should be expanded.

52. Response of the Administration. The Director, Regional Bureau for Arab States and Europe, noted that updated documentation would be available for the Governing Council at its thirty-eighth session. He reassured the Committee that not only the countries in the region of the conflict would benefit from the SPR allocation, but, that also countries such as South-Asian and European countries affected by the crisis would also benefit, as required. He also noted that the $4 million SPR allocation was very small considering the needs created - the Gulf Task Force estimated that tens of millions of dollars were needed and he hoped the Governing Council would give full consideration to the issue. The Gulf Task Force had adopted a "demand-driven" approach, based on clear criteria, and responding to requests from Governments through field offices - such requests were believed to be forthcoming from several countries and would be handled as soon as they were received; collaboration with United Nations specialized agencies had been excellent.

53. The Senior Adviser on Humanitarian Affairs to the Administrator then briefed the Standing Committee on the United Nations inter-agency humanitarian relief operations, under the leadership of the Secretary-General's Executive Delegate. A consolidated humanitarian appeal was expected soon.

VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS TO THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

54. At its 6th meeting, on 10 May 1991, the Standing Committee for Programme Matters adopted the present report.